Is America ready for gay marriage?

Yes: U.S. based on equality under the law

By EVAN WOLFSON

One of the questions that Americans differ on is whether to end the exclusion of same-sex couples from marriage. As fair-minded people take in the new information they are receiving — including the important difference between religious marriage rites and legal marriage rights — the country is entering a civil rights moment in which we are all asked whether we really believe that all are entitled to equality under the law.

Earlier this month, gay and non-gay people supporting an end to marriage discrimination marked "Freedom to Marry Week." The Massachusetts, Virginia, Georgia and California legislatures debated, while in San Francisco, thousands of couples lined up — some overnight, some in the rain, some with their kids and parents — just to exercise the freedom to marry.

First to get legally married were Del Martin, 83, and Phyllis Lyon, 79, who celebrated their 51st anniversary together that same week. After more than half a century of personal commitment to one another, these women had waited long enough to deserve the legal commitment of marriage without discrimination from the government.

While some elected officials such as the Kennedyesque Mayor Gavin Newsom of San Francisco showed civil rights profiles in courage, other politicians such as Gov. Mitt Romney of Massachusetts continued to resist civil rights, defy the constitution and appeal to the worst in people. Like Govs. George Wallace and Orval Faubus at earlier civil rights moments, Romney threatens to stand in the doorway to block loving couples from crossing the threshold to equality.

While other non-gay voices such as NAACP Chair Julian Bond, Mayor Richard Daley of Chicago and even Clint Eastwood spoke up in support of marriage equality, right-wing groups such as Focus on the Family, with its $125 million budget and political agenda, ratcheted up the anti-gay campaign to go state by state and pressure the federal government into piling layer upon layer of discrimination on gay families already denied basic protections under law in nearly every state.

And this time, so fearful are these opponents of equality that they are losing the discussion, they are pushing a constitutional amendment to try to shut down the discussion and cement discrimination into our nation's most precious document, tying the hands of all states and all future generations.

As in past civil rights moments, opponents claim that marriage and civilization itself will be destroyed if discrimination ends. But this is not the first time our country has struggled over exclusion from marriage. Previous chapters in American history have seen race discrimination in marriage, laws making wives legally inferior to husbands, resistance to allowing people to end failed or abusive marriages through divorce, and even a refusal to allow married and unmarried people to make their own decisions about whether to use contraception or raise children.

In each of these civil rights struggles, opponents claimed that the proposed change was "against the definition of marriage" and "against God's will." Fortunately, our country rejected the-sky-is-falling claims of opponents and made marriage a more inclusive and fair commitment of equals. As the Massachusetts court and others have made clear, government simply has no good reason for continuing to deny same-sex couples marriage licenses.

By contrast, there are many reasons to support marriage equality. From tax treatment to cheaper family membership rates, from the ability to assure a spouse's health care in times of crisis to the right to inherit hard-earned pension or Social Security — older couples like Del and Phyllis as well as the children raised by same-sex couples need and deserve the protections and security marriage can bring to their families. There is no good reason for shoving any group of Americans outside the legal protections and responsibilities their taxes pay for, or to deny gay people the dream of building a life together with a partner in marriage.

Thousands of same-sex couples have married in Canada and Europe, thousands more now in San Francisco, and on May 17, the 50th anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education, civil marriage licenses will be issued in Massachusetts.

Politicians should stop making America a house divided and reflect on how they want to be remembered 30 years from now, when we look back on this civil rights moment. Gay or non-gay, we can all seize this chance to live up to our country's commitment to equality under the law, and even take a stand for love and the pursuit of happiness.

No: There is more to families than biology

By GLENN T. STANTON

Same-sex marriage deconstructs our understanding of humanity.

When four justices from Massachusetts' Supreme Judicial Court declared unconstitutional what all human civilizations throughout time have seen as quite beyond question — that marriage is about men and women — they did something far more radical.

The court actually reduced the beautifully complex nature of male and female to mere sperm and womb. It said to you, madam, that your femininity exists only in your eggs. And to you, sir, that your masculinity is found only in your sperm. The justices have reduced who we are — in the deepest part of our humanity — to our sheer biological reproduction. And though we haven't met, I trust your gender is a bit more integral to who you are than that.

The court's mistake is confusing one primary difference in same-sex and opposite-sex couples — the ability to create new life without outside assistance — with the difference in same-sex and opposite sex couples. The Massachusetts court found the State's defense of traditional marriage lacking because it relies on the social value of procreation. In explanation, the court recognizes the ability to create new life as "the one unbridgeable difference between same-sex and opposite-sex couples."

The court then says that current marriage law "identifies persons by a single trait and then denies them protection across the board."

Do you get that? This court has reduced your participation in your marriage, as a male or a female, to sperm or egg.

The court would have us believe your wife's only essential value as a woman is her womb or your husband's, his seed. That, it says, is the only unique thing we, as gendered-beings, bring to the table. Everything else, the court would have us believe, is "bridgeable."

And that, it concludes, is why a ban on same-sex marriage is wrong. Does anyone still believe gender is merely social construction?

Think about your relationship with your spouse or your parents. There is much more happening there in the female/male dynamic than just procreation.

To understand how the value of male and female exists outside of reproduction, think about how different your workplace would be if it consisted only of males or females. And smart money wagers it wouldn't be much of a place to work regardless of which sex held it. And why do so many people shell out big dollars for "Venus and Mars" seminars if there's no real differences to understand?

Males and females bring deep and necessary things to each other. It is through the profound value — and mystery — of male and female that we understand and experience much of the power of our collective humanity.

The power of sex differentiation is the real active ingredient of marriage and this is exactly why this model has favor over other domestic options in all societies through history. It is the only social institution that brings the necessary qualities of male and female together in a respectful, cooperative, relationship, where the two distinct parts of humanity complete and complement one another.

But the Massachusetts court and same-sex family proponents say none of that really matters. Women don't really need men, husbands don't really need wives and children don't really need mothers and fathers. If we do need a spouse or a parent, anyone for whom we have loving feelings will do. It's all just a matter of personal choice.

But can we truly say that any of us can play the role of husband or wife, regardless of what nature has endowed us with?

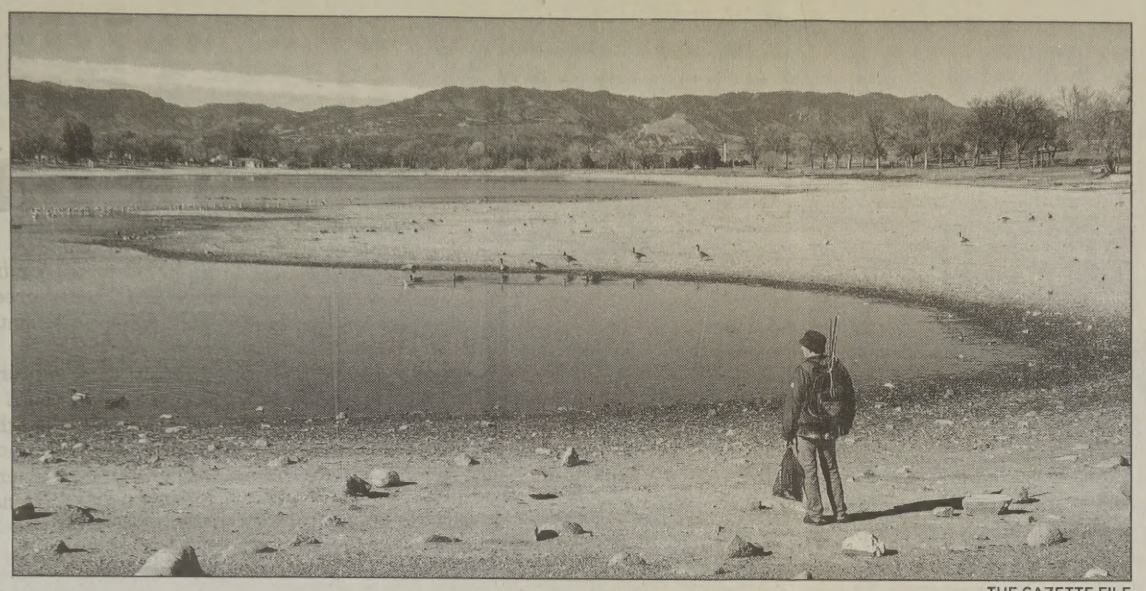
Can we really believe that a child will find all she needs from a mother in two loving, nurturing men? Can that child find what he needs from a father in two strong, compassionate women?

And this gets us to why same-sex families are actually cruel — they intentionally deny every child they touch either their biological mother or father — all in the interest of fulfilling adult desires.

Anthropology tells us no human society, ancient or modern, primitive or civilized, has ever sustained itself with a buffet-like family model — just pick what suits you. Whether this is done in an effort to serve "fairness" cannot soften the consequences. We cannot escape that male and female matter.

And so, in redefining marriage, the court and same-sex marriage proponents diminish all of our humanity by saying we are only generic persons randomly equipped with either sperm or eggs. This deconstruction will not be without profound and painful consequences.

Wolfson is the executive director of Freedom to Marry (www.freedomtomarry.org), the gay and non-gay partnership for marriage equality nationwide. Stanton is director of Social Research and Cultural Affairs at Focus on the Family (www.family.org). They will debate this issue tonight at 6:30 at the Fine Arts Center. The free event no longer has tickets available.



BOTTOM'S UP: Water receded in Prospect Lake in 2002 when city council turned off its potable water pipeline. It was refilled in 2003, but water again drained quickly. The council will discuss the fate of the lake at an informal meeting March 8.

THE GAZETTE FILE

PROSPECT: Lake proposals carry big price tags

FROM PAGE 1

give up,'" he told Butcher. "I consider that report irresponsible."

The council will have several options.

First, it must decide whether to reline the bottom of the lake to stop 69.1 million gallons a year from draining into the ground below. ADP officials estimated this could cost $5 million.

Officials then must determine where to get the water to replace the evaporation.

Such drastic receding hadn't happened earlier because Colorado Springs Utilities pumped in water for free all summer.

Utilities director Phil Tollefson plans to charge the city if it wants to fill Prospect Lake with drinking water. The estimated bill: $389,000.

Vice Mayor Richard Skorman said he wants to accelerate a study of whether water can be captured from underground channels and pumped back into the lake. It is unlikely that could be completed in time for swimming season.

In raising the issue, the council will be able to say before the snow melts whether the lake can be used for anything more than sightseeing this year.

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DISPATCH: Transfer could save town thousands

FROM PAGE 1

the city from transferring the service.

"No one knows Manitou like local people," said resident Deborah Steddom, who is gathering signatures to put the matter on the town's next ballot.

"I can call a dispatcher now and I know who it is. I can say, 'I'm having a heart attack in front of Tubby's.' They will know where that is. The county dispatchers will need an address."

Mayor Marcy Morrison said the town's five-person dispatch center has had a problem keeping employees.

During the two years she's been in office, the entire department has turned over at least once, she said.

Town dispatchers who are paid $9 to $10 an hour leave for better-paying jobs with the county or other emergency agencies, she said.

Often, only one dispatcher is on duty, making it difficult to handle multiple emergencies, Morrison said.

The solution is going to the county, she said. "The only difference is who picks up the telephone to take your call."

It also would save the town money, said Morrison, a former county commissioner.

Manitou dispatchers cost the town $184,254 a year.

If the service is upgraded and employees are added, it would cost $270,000, said Mike Leslie, Manitou's budget and finance director.

The county would charge $137,000 a year for the service, with an annual 3 percent increase.

An additional $15,000 would be charged the first year. The county's dispatch center serves all parts of unincorporated El Paso County, the towns of Calhan, Green Mountain Falls, Monument and Palmer Lake and 25 fire departments.

The county's 36 dispatchers allow the center to have as many as five dispatchers at all times, said El Paso County Sheriff Terry Maketa.

Manitou's dispatch gets about 3,000 calls a year.

The county handles 20,000 a year. If the county takes on Manitou Springs, two dispatcher positions will be added, Maketa said. The matter must be agreed upon by the county commissioners.

"There's no question in my mind that we would improve the level of service," Maketa said.

"The bottom line is it's a smaller community, and they're used to doing things and having things the way they have it today, and the thought of change brings about some fear. That's normal with any change of this magnitude."

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ARMY KIDS: Talking to teachers helps shift

FROM PAGE 1

with the frequent moves that accompany their parents' military careers.

"Move at the wrong time, and you could miss multiplication," said Mary Keller, executive director of the Texas-based Military Child Education Coalition. "That could come in handy."

Keller told an audience of more than 50 people that moving children takes a combination of tenacity, organization and compassion.

Tenacity comes in asking the right questions before the move to learn about such things as new schools.

Organization comes in getting all the paperwork ready to make sure the transition is seamless.

Compassion comes in helping those children make friends and deal with missing their old schools.

Fort Carson has been working with schools near the post for more than a year to help children cope with the largest troop deployment since World War II.

Fort Carson and school officials estimate more than 90 percent of families of the soldiers in Iraq stayed in town during the deployment.

"Usually it's about sensitivity," said Hope Metzler, Fort Carson liaison between the Army and area schools.

"If you make the teacher aware of the child's situation and needs, the teacher can better help the child."

Keller said helping children through transitions, such as the deployment or a move, starts with parents and teachers talking.

"We're very familiar with how things work when parents and educators work as partners," she said.

Keller suggested swapping e-mail addresses with the child's teacher and stressed that families making a move must let the school know as quickly as possible.

She said during times of change at home, children often take comfort in school.

"School is where the predictability is," she said.

She also said soldiers who get leave on their return from Iraq shouldn't pull their kids out of school for 30-day vacations.

"School is that child's job," she said.

All soldiers returning from the war will get a 30-day leave.

Metzler said it's a family decision about whether soldiers pull their kids out of school but predicted most parents won't want to harm their child's education.

"Parents know the importance of education," she said.

The coalition Keller leads has pushed a program to connect schools near military bases on an interactive network that allows teachers to share information to help a student through a move.

So far, 52 school districts, including several in Colorado Springs, are in the network.

Metzler said her office at Carson is gearing up for the moves to come.

"We have a huge support system for families," she said.

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SERVICES

Rhoda Frances Bruce
Services, 2 p.m. today, Memorial Gardens Chapel. Burial, Memorial Gardens Cemetery. Swan Law Funeral Directors.

Opal Ina Foushee
Memorial services, 2 p.m. today, Kiowa Creek Community Church, 231 Cheyenne St., Kiowa. Shrine of Remembrance Funeral Home.

William W. Noll Jr.
Services, 1 p.m. today, Nolan Funeral Home Chapel. Burial, Evergreen Cemetery.

McKenzie Rae Parcells
Services, 2 p.m. Thursday, Air Force Academy Cadet Chapel. Burial,

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